

July 21-22, 2018

"Come Away & Rest for a While"

Dr. Keith D. Herron, Senior Minister

St. Lucas UCC, St. Louis MO

Mark 6:30-43

The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

2 Samuel 7:1-14a; Psalm 89:20-37; Ephesians 2:11-22

Why couldn't they just let him alone for one minute? Why couldn't they give him one blessed moment to himself? The crowds that followed Jesus into the wilderness were like little children who could only think of themselves. They wanted him. They needed him and they needed him right then. Couldn't they see he was wounded? Couldn't they feel his pain?

Jesus tried his best to pull away for self-nurture and the press of the crowds broke like a wave over him, knocking him off his feet. There were so many people. They were all around him. That was part of his problem! They wanted something from him and they needed it from him in the moment. They didn't care he had needs of his own. The problem with caregivers is there are so many needs and so little opportunity for self-care. So many hurting people ... so many mouths to feed! They were hungry like a nest full of baby birds clamoring for a morsel of food.

Jesus had just come from his hometown where he was among the people who had nurtured him to maturity. They whispered to one another, *"Where does he get this wisdom and how does he do these deeds of power? Isn't this the carpenter's son?"* But that wasn't all as Jesus received the tragic news he wasn't prepared to hear. Herod had beheaded John. Maybe that's what drove the crowds to him. Maybe they were in shock at the news that swept over the Galilean countryside.

Where do caregivers go when they hurt? How do they take care of their own deep sense of grief? Who cares for them when their pain overwhelms them? Just when Jesus needed time alone to absorb his world of pain, the crowds chased after him and wouldn't let him go. You can almost see them, can't you? He was in the boat trying to escape and the swarm of people ran along the shoreline to go wherever Jesus went. Wherever he landed, they were there to greet him. Scurrying along the shoreline to be with Jesus, so many people ... so much pain ... so many mouths to feed!

"As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd." What a powerful thing to be said about Jesus that he would have compassion for them. He looked beyond his own world of pain and his own need for isolation and he saw them for what they were: They were hurting people just like him. He understood them and so he stopped running. He understood their needs took precedence over his own. Jesus put his own needs aside like a parent who raises his or her children and sacrifices to see

they have everything necessary for life even though it means sacrificing their own needs.

Jesus was hounded by the crowds in the midst of his own personal pain. It was a powerful moment because Jesus accepted the crowd into his personal world of pain. And out of that sense of pain, he sat them all down on the shoreline and attended to them first by curing the sick among them. Jesus, the Great Physician hurting himself, stopped running and looked after their pain and suffering. And before long, the body overcame the spirit and the disciples brought the next crisis to him for resolve: *"Jesus, the people are getting hungry and it's late and we're so far from town that they won't be able to get any food to eat. What'll we do?"* Ever the teacher, Jesus tried to get them to see that they already had the answer in their own resources. *"Don't send anyone away,"* he told them, *"You guys figure it out ... why do I have you here? Take this and deal with it ... You feed them!"* *"But master, we only have a few loaves and some fish."*

Maybe what took place that day was the miracle that anyone who has ever organized a potluck would understand. Those given charge of organizing the meal wonder and worry to themselves, *"Will there be enough? What if we run out before the end of the line gets their food?"* The question always comes up, *"Will there be enough food?"* And it's always in some small measure this miracle. Somehow the food lasts to the very last person and sure enough, there's always enough. Jesus' approach was to take the little boy's lunch and start the work of redistribution. How did it happen? I don't have a clue. But when it was all said and done, they gathered up what was left and there was more.

We approach this story with our powers of analytical thought and we want to know how it happened. But the miracle is *why* it happened and what it meant. This story doesn't care how it happened. It's interested in this: In the Kingdom of God, there's enough for everyone. In the Kingdom of God, what starts with just a few continues to multiply until all have been fed. Did Jesus override the physical laws of the conservation of matter by multiplying the handful of loaves and fish? Or did his generosity prompt the generosity of the whole crowd who suddenly realized it was okay to share their own meager resources? Who knows? What does it matter?

Both are theories on how this story can be explained with our analytical minds. But on our theological side (the side we use to connect to God), it helps us to remember that in the Kingdom of God what gets shared gets multiplied. In the conservation of God, the storerooms open up and things gravitate to the point of need. Jesus' job was merely to start the work of redistribution. The rest was done by the disciples and by the crowds who were there to see Jesus do something with his power. It was in the simplicity of this act of faith that characterizes Jesus as a Social Radical and distinguishes him from all the others who claim that label for themselves. Jesus was a Social Radical because he came to open things up.

Jesus seems to have no sense of the phrase, *"after the revolution."* His revolution is always now. Jesus seems to always be working in the present moment and doesn't look too far over the horizon at some unrecognizable scenario in the distant future.

Jesus is not worried about tomorrow, he deals only with this moment. In response to the pragmatist's question, "What good will that do?" Jesus responds calmly with a cup of cool water, a widow's mite, five loaves of bread, two fish. The answer Jesus gives is always the same, *"Let's see ... Let's give it a chance. Act with me in faith and let's see what might happen."*¹

There were two miracles that day. The obvious one was the miracle itself. A huge crowd simply shared what they had and it was enough. Hungry and hurting, the resources for their sustenance came from within their own resources. Something happened in the group and it all got shared and there was enough. All they needed was for Jesus to help them see what was in their midst all along. What they needed was someone with vision to help them appropriate the resources that were with them in their need.

But I think the second miracle may have taken place within Jesus himself. There was recognition in the moment of his pain where the dynamic God meets with human beings and we realize something more profound can happen within us. Jesus moved into this moment hurt, staggering, and bleeding. His own sense of pain was very real, and his need to move away from the world was very real. In his desperate attempt to deal with himself, there was the realization he couldn't get away. And so he stopped to meet their needs.

I think Jesus' own miracle was the inner affirmation that, *"What I have is enough. Who I am is enough. I can break my body and it's enough. I can lay my body on the altar and it's enough."*

Running for cover so he could tend to his own world of pain, Jesus discovered he couldn't run fast enough to find a quiet place to tend to his own hurt. What he discovered was that even in his own pain, he had enough for the needs of day that was fast approaching. What he discovered was that he himself, the bread and wine of life, was enough to feed the whole world.

© Dr. Keith D. Herron 2018

¹ Garrett Keizer, *The Christian Century*, July 14-21, 1999, 707